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SUBJECT: PM ALEXIS: 2008 IS "HAITI'S PIVOTAL YEAR"

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.5(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. In meeting January 16, Prime Minister Alexis termed 2008 Haiti's "pivotal year." His priorities for the period will be education and grassroots development. The PM has launched the PIC program, aimed at bringing project assistance to the communal level and is seeking USG support for this effort. He lauded the establishment of a presidential commission for education reform and said that the government will redouble its efforts to work on education. He asked again for more USG assistance in that sector. I stressed the need to move forward on the senatorial election and not be sidetracked by redrafts of the bylaws or personal disputes among the members. Alexis wants to see the new senators take office before June. Alexis was surprised to learn that we have yet to sign the LOA for construction of a police station in Cite Soleil. Told that the Minister of Justice had again pushed the signing off, he said he would intervene. He recommitted to putting police in Cite Soleil full time, assuring me that the GOH wants a full government presence in the former gang territory. End summary.

12. (C) I called on Prime Minister Alexis January 16 to discuss his plans for the new year in the wake of his two hour "balance sheet" speech in parliament earlier in the week. Wryly acknowledging that the parliamentary presentation was "painfully long," Alexis said that he had attempted to get the parliament to accept a much shortened oral executive summary, but to no avail. The deputies demanded a complete discussion of the government's activities in 2007, and he was compelled to present one. However, as much as had been done thus far, both by Haitians alone and by Haitians working with the international community, 2008 is Haiti's pivotal year. Only when the lives of average Haitians change for the better, the PM said, can Haiti's democracy truly be said to have borne fruit. Towards that end, he has made education and grassroots development his priorities for the new year.

Bringing Hope to the Grassroots  
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13. (C) Alexis wants to get assistance to all levels of Haitian society as quickly as possible. He outlined for me a new program called PIC (Programme pour l'Investissement des Communes), run from the prime ministry. This program supports quick-impact projects at the communal level. Mayors and parliamentary deputies, working together, submit projects to the prime ministry for funding. (As an aside, the PM observed that the national legislators and local leaders appear to be getting along in most cases because they can

both claim credit for bringing money to the localities.) The projects run anywhere from a few thousand gourdes to upwards to a million gourdes; they include school rehabilitation projects, road re-paving, market stalls construction, and drilling water wells. The funding comes from a line item in the national budget and is currently set at 40 million gourdes (a little over USD 1 million), although the PM admitted it was unclear that he would get that much money at the end of the day from the budget. The Prime Ministry promises a decision on project proposals in 30 days or less, money is moved in the same period. (Note. If so, this would be a remarkable feat in Haiti. End note.) Thus far, of the nation's 140 communes, more than 80 have already received funding for projects. Alexis hopes to move money into all corners of the country. In addition to giving hope to local authorities, the project has encouraged local political leaders - often at odds - to work together. Alexis sought USG assistance to support this program and will provide us with a more specific proposal shortly.

14. (C) Alexis linked success in the PIC process to political stability. He argues that getting hope to the local level is key, noting that despite economic uncertainties, the rural areas have thus far remained quiet. "It's because we are finally getting something to them....it's overdue. And we need help," he stated. There were those who wanted to subvert this process, the PM noted, that wanted to see the government fail. Alexis claimed that "extremist elements" had accused him of going beyond his mandate because he is reaching out to the people. He has pushed back, he said, reminding them that a year ago or even two, many of them had been in jail. Now they can talk to whom they want and move about the country. Then, in a reference to former Aristide Prime Minister Neptune, Alexis said, "they will try to come back if we do not give hope to the countryside." (Note. The

PORT AU PR 00000090 002 OF 003

PIC program enjoys the happy coincidence of also supporting Alexis's own political aspirations. End note.)

#### The Pivotal Role of Primary Education

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15. (SBU) A former educator himself, Alexis said that Haiti must do a better job in giving its children access to education. The government must begin to make headway on the educational agenda in 2008. Referring to the recently established Presidential Commission on Education, headed by Kiskeya University President Jacque Lamarque, Alexis said that the government is seeking a bi-partisan, national approach to the education problem. To that end, Preval has named individuals as diverse as civil society leader Rosny Desroches and politician (and former Minister of Education) Victor Benoit to the Commission. Alexis noted that this group must be creative in its efforts to address Haiti's mounting educational problems. The government, Alexis said, clearly cannot provide education to all. As a former Minister of Education himself, this is difficult to admit, but true. More than half a million kids who should be in elementary school are not now being educated. More than 40 percent of children in elementary school drop out before high school. The country needs more schooling space and more teachers. The Ministry of Education is negotiating with private schools to use their sites for additional classes after hours. The teacher training colleges in Port au Prince and Les Cayes are putting on double shifts. And the government intends to redouble its efforts to build new schools. The PM also wants to get parents more involved with their children's schooling. Alexis sadly acknowledged, however, that Haiti's education system will take years to right and stressed his hope that the USG would get more involved in the sector.

Elections

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¶6. (C) Remarking that I had visited with the newly appointed members of the CEP last week, and met with CEP Director General Jacques Bernard the day before, I reminded the PM that we looked forward to a quick announcement of the date for the senatorial elections. Consolidating the democratic gains of 2006 was critical to Haiti's future and much time had unfortunately been wasted, I observed. Success for the important policy agenda of 2008 laid out by the president in parliament would be heavily dependent on a fully functioning parliament playing its constitutional role. The PM agreed and said that getting the elections up and running was a key government priority.

¶7. (C) Alexis assured me that the CEP is moving forward with decisions that will allow an election this spring. He hopes to see newly elected senators taking their seats by June 1. I expressed some concern about reports that the CEP by-laws were being rewritten; Alexis responded that he believed they were being updated but agreed there was no intention to reinvent the wheel. The CEP (and the DG) did its job in 2006; it needed to do so again. He claimed that the president has been involved in getting all the key players to get along together for the good of the country, but he acknowledged that there was a significant learning curve for individuals who had never been associated with elections before. We both agreed that personal difference among the CEP members, which appeared to be developing, should be avoided at all costs.

Police presence in Cite Soleil

¶8. (C) Alexis asked when we were going to start constructing the police commissariat in Cite Soleil, a project proposed under the Haiti Stabilization Initiative. We were ready, I replied, but the Minister of Justice again put off signing the LOA when we met with him yesterday. Without that document, we cannot move forward. Alexis said he would intervene immediately to see what was delaying that formality. I added that we still sensed some reservation on the part of the HNP with regard to a permanent police presence in Cite Soleil, although we had all agreed in the past that a strong government presence in the neighborhood was not only desirable but essential. I said that the time was long past for plans to be made to move the HNP into Cite Soleil and the PM assured me that the police will be stationed inside Cite Soleil once the commissariat is built.

PORT AU PR 00000090 003 OF 003

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